

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9424
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 KINSHASA 4223

CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
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TAGS: EAID, ECON, CG
SUBJECT: THE MOBUTU REGIME: POLITICAL PRICE OF ECONOMIC DETERIORATION

1. SUMMARY: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS--NOTABLY THE GOZ'S HANDLING OF
CIVIL DISORDERS IN BANDUNDU, THE RECENT COUP PLOT TRIAL AND
EXECUTIONS, AND THE CURRENT PURGE OF MILITARY OFFICERS--REFLECT
MOBUTU'S RISING ANXIETIES CONCERNING THE SECURITY OF HIS REGIME

AND HIS DETERMINATION TO ASSERT TIGHTER CONTROL. MOBUTU'S CONCERNS ARE HEIGHTENED BY HIS FEAR OF SOVIET/CUBAN/ANGOLAN SUBVERSION ON THE ONE HAND, AND BY HIS PRECEPTION OF INADEQUATE POLITICAL SUPPORT FROM THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER WESTERN FRIENDS ON THE OTHER. IN THE SHORT RUN, MOBUTU'S FORCEFUL REACTIONS SHOULD SERVE TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY. IN THE LONGER RUN, HOWEVER, MOBUTU'S POLITICAL VIABILITY WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON EXERCISING EFFECTIVE CONTROL, PARTICULARLY OVER THE MILITARY, BUT ALSO ON EASING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HARDSHIPS NOW AFFLICTING MOST ELEMENTS OF THE POPULACE BEFORE THEIR ENDURANCE RUNS OUT. MOBUTU'S ABILITY TO ACHIEVE BOTH THESE OBJECTIVES IS INCREASINGLY UNCERTAIN. END SUMMARY

2. MOBUTU'S GROWING SENSE OF INSECURITY: DURING RECENT WEEKS PRESIDENT MOBUTU HAS EVIDENCED INCREASING ANXIETY WITH RESPECT TO THE SECURITY OF HIS REGIME. IN OUR RECENT MEETINGS WITH HIM, HE HAS BEEN NOTABLY NERVOUS, EVEN JUMPY. OTHERS HAVE NOTED THE SAME THING. WE KNOW THAT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO MOBUTU WAS INFORMED OF A BELGIAN-BASED ASSASSINATION PLOT, AND THAT SINCE THEN HE HAS TAKEN EXTRA PRECAUTIONS SUCH AS MINIMIZING HELICOPTER TRAVEL. WE ALSO KNOW THAT MOBUTU HAS RECEIVED A STEADY STREAM OF REPORTS FROM HIS AGENTS ABROAD CONCERNING REAL OR ALLEGED PLOTS BY VARIOUS ZAIRIAN DISSIDENTS LIVING OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. HEIGHTENING THIS ANXIETY IS THE PROSPECT THAT SOME OF THESE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, LONG STRANDED IN EUROPE AND ESTRANGED FROM THEIR SOURCES OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL SUPPORT, MIGHT YET OBTAIN ASSISTANCE AND A SECRET

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BASE FOR OPERATIONS CLOSER TO HOME NOW THAT ANGOLA IS UNDER MARXIST CONTROL. HENCE WE FIND MOBUTU DEEPLY CONCERNED BY REPORTS THAT ALGERIA IS NOT ONLY TRAINING EX-KATANGAN GENDARMES IN GUERRILLA WARFARE BUT IS FACILITATING CONTACTS BETWEEN THEM AND EUROPEAN-BASED DISSIDENT FIGURES SUCH AS GIZENGA AND MARC LEADER MONGUYA. SIMILARLY, MOBUTU FRETS ABOUT THE NEW CUBAN PRESENCE IN BURUNDI AND WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR THE MARXIST-ORIENTED PRP REBELS JUST ACROSS LAKE TANGANYIKA IN ZAIRE'S EASTERN MOUNTAINS. AS WE HAVE SEEN ONLY RECENTLY, MOBUTU'S FEARS OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT ARE SUCH THAT HIS SUSPECIONS CAN EASILY EXTEND BEYOND THE USUAL SOVIET/CUBAN ORBIT TO ANY FOREIGNERS--BELGIAN AND US INCLUDED--WHO MAY HAVE EVEN THE MOST PASSING CONTACT WITH OPPOSITION ELEMENTS.

3. NOTORIOUSLY PARANOID EVEN IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, MOBUTU PROBABLY EXAGGERATES IN HIS OWN MIND THE MAGNITUDE AND IMMEDIACY OF THE THEAT TO HIS RULE. THE EXILED OPPOSITION GROUPS, WHICH DURING LAST YEAR'S SHABA INVASION REVEALED THEMSELVES SO DISORGANIZED AND DIVIDED, SEEM TO HAVE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN STRENGTHENING THEIR CAPACITY FOR MOUNTING A COORDINATED ACTION PROGRAM. WHILE THE KATANGAN GENDARMES IN ANGOLA REMAIN A THREAT TO SHABA, THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT'S OWN

PROBLEMS OF INTERNAL SECURITY LESSEN THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE GENDARMES WILL RECEIVE THE KIND OF SUPPORT THEY WOULD NEED FOR ANOTHER MAJOR ATTACK ON ZAIRE. AT HOME, MOBUTU'S SECURITY APPARATUS (CND) REMAINS EFFECTIVE IN DISCOURAGING ANY SEMBLANCE OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION OR DISSENT.

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CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

4. IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE, HOWEVER, TO DISMISS MOBUTU'S CURRENT

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FEELINGS OF INSECURITY AS STEMMING SOLELY FROM OVERBLOWN FEARS AND MISDIRECTED SUSPICIONS. HE IS TOO PERCEPTIVE NOT TO REALIZE THAT POPULAR DISCONTENT, AND WITH IT THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL UNREST, CONTINUES TO GROW AS HIS LEADERSHIP HAS SO FAR FAILED TO ARREST THE DETERIORATION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN BOTH THE CITIES AND THE COUNTRYSIDE. AND AS THE ECONOMIC CRISIS PERSISTS, MOBUTU FINDS IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO TAKE CARE OF THE NEEDS OF BOTH THE POLITICALLY-ESSENTIAL ELITE AND THE INCREASINGLY HARD-PRESSED MASSES. HIS DILEMMA IS HOW TO EFFECT THE REFORMS NECESSARY FOR NATIONAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RETENTION OF POLITICAL CONTROL IN THE LONG RUN WITHOUT CUTTING TOO DEEPLY INTO THE STATUS OF ELITE ELEMENTS (ESPECIALLY THE MILITARY) AND THEREBY RISKING LOSS OF THEIR SUPPORT. MOBUTU'S STRATEGY SO FAR IS TO USE A CARROT AND STICK APPROACH TO BOTH THE MASSES AND THE ELITE. HENCE IN DEALING WITH THE FORMER, MOBUTU PROMISES LIBERALIZATION AND REFORM, BUT THEN REPRESSES ANY CIVIL UNREST (E.G., BANDUNDU) WITH A DELIBERATE SHOW OF FORCE. SIMILARLY, THE ELITE IS PERIODICALLY REMINDED (E.G., THE NGUZA AND COUP PLOT TRIALS) THAT THEIR PRIVILEGED POSITION CAN BE TAKEN AWAY ON THE SLIGHTEST PRETEXT.

5. PURGE OF THE MILITARY: MOBUTU OF COURSE UNDERSTANDS THAT THE MILITARY IS THE KEY ELEMENT OF THE ELITE IN TERMS OF POTENTIAL CHALLENGE TO HIS RULE. AND WITHIN THE RANKS HE PERCEIVES THE GREATEST THREAT AS COMING FROM OFFICERS FROM THOSE TRIBES IN THE SOUTHERN AND EASTERN REGIONS WHICH HISTORICALLY HAVE BEEN MOST OPPOSED TO DOMINATION BY KINSHASA. THE CURRENT PURGE OF MOST ARMY OFFICERS FROM SHABA AND THE KASAI--PERHAPS AS MANY AS 700 OUT OF A TOTAL OFFICER CORPS OF 5,000--REFLECTS THE MAGNITUDE OF MOBUTU'S SUSPICIONS AND THE LENGTHS TO WHICH HE FEELS COMPELLED TO GO IN NEUTRALIZING THE POTENTIAL THREAT. WHILE IN THE SHORT RUN THIS MAY WORK, THE LONGER-TERM IMPACT ON MILITARY MORALE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE

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REGIME, NOT TO MENTION THE ARMY'S DEFENSE CAPABILITY, SEEMS LIKELY TO BE NEGATIVE. FOR SOME TIME THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF DETERIORATING MORALE AMONG TROOPS STATIONED IN SHABA AND ELSEWHERE DUE TO SUPPLY SHORTAGES, LONG DELAYS IN PAY AND OTHER HARDSHIPS. THE ADDED SENSE OF INSECURITY INEVITABLY CREATED IN THE OFFICER CORPS BY THE TRIAL AND CURRENT PURGE, WHILE INDUCING LOYALTY TODAY, MAY TOMORROW CONTRIBUTE TO FURTHER DISSIDENCE IN THE ONE FACET OF THE ELITE MOBUTU CAN LEAST AFFORD TO ALIENATE.

6. ECONOMIC RECOVERY: KEY TO POLITICAL SURVIVAL: ASSUMING MOBUTU CAN KEEP HIS MILITARY IN LINE AND MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY IN THE NEAR TERM, THE CHALLENGE WILL INCREASINGLY BECOME THAT OF IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE WORKER AND FARMER BEFORE THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SLIDE REACHES THE LIMITS OF POPULAR ENDURANCE. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN MOBUTU'S ABILITY AND WILL TO EFFECT ECONOMIC RECOVERY HAS BEEN BADLY ERODED BY THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LAST THREE YEARS. IMPLEMENTATION OF MOBUTU'S MUCH-HERALDED REFORM PROGRAM HAS BEEN SLOW AND UNEVEN AT BEST. INFLATION REMAINS AT ABOUT 80 PERCENT ANNUAL RATE, WHILE WAGES HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO RISE AT NOT MUCH OVER 20 PERCENT. ALMOST EVERYTHING FROM MANIOC TO GASOLINE REMAINS EITHER IN CRITICALLY SHORT SUPPLY OR AVAILABLE ONLY AT HIGH PRICES. DESPITE MOBUTU'S STRONG DENUNCIATIONS, CORRUPTION AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY IS BEING PERPETUATED AND EXACERBATED AS PURCHASING POWER DIMINISHES AND INCOME DISPARITY INCREASES. EVEN IF MOBUTU CARRIES OUT THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF REFORM--AS HE NOW SEEMS TO BE TRYING TO DO, HOWEVER BELATEDLY--THE DAY STILL SEEMS FAR AWAY WHEN RECOVERY WILL IMPACT ON THE EVERYDAY WELL-BEING OF THE MASSES. CERTAINLY THE GREATEST INDUCEMENT FOR MOBUTU TO MAKE THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND SACRIFICES INHERENT IN REFORM IS THE FACT THAT ULTIMATELY HIS POLITICAL SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON THE SUCCESS OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY. WE BELIEVE MOBUTU UNDERSTANDS THE VITAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TWO; WHAT IS INCREASINGLY UNCERTAIN IS WHETHER ENOUGH RECOVERY CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN TIME TO DEFUSE

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THE POLITICAL PRESSURES WHICH WE NOW SEE DEVELOPING.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR US-ZAIRIAN RELATIONS: ONE OF MOBUTU'S CUSTOMARY TACTICS IN COPING WITH HIS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS IS TO MAINTAIN AND ALSO DEMONSTRATE PUBLICLY THE SUPPORT HIS REGIME RECEIVES FROM THE US, BELGIUM, FRANCE AND OTHER WESTERN POWERS. WHILE IN MATERIAL TERMS THIS SUPPORT HAS BEEN MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT ZAIRE'S CURRENT CRISIS, MOBUTU WORRIES ABOUT DIMINISHING EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL AND MORAL SUPPORT, NOTABLY FROM THE US. POINTING TO LAST YEAR'S SHABA INVASION AS A PAINFUL EXAMPLE, HE ARGUES THAT THE GROWING AMBIGUITY OF OUR SUPPORT SERVES TO ENCOURAGE ZAIRE'S FOREIGN ENEMIES WHO WOULD REPLACE HIS MODERATE REGIME WITH A MARXIST STATE. WHAT HE DOES NOT SAY EXPLICITLY--BUT WHAT MUST WORRY HIM JUST AS MUCH--IS THAT OUR LOWER POSTURE VIS-A-VIS HIS REGIME MAY ALSO HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON LATENT OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WITHIN ZAIRE. MOBUTU'S CONCERN ON THIS SCORE IS UNDERSTANDABLE, CONSIDERING THE UNUSUAL IMPORTANCE WHICH ZAIRIANS TEND TO ATTACH TO WHATEVER THE US DOES OR DOES NOT DO VIS-A-VIS THEIR GOVERNMENT. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE MUST EXPECT THE CURRENT STRAINS IN OUR OFFICIAL RELATIONS TO PERSIST SO LONG AS MOBUTU INTERPRETS

OUR POSTURE AS IMPLYING LACK OF APPROVAL; AND THE STRAINS ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE TO THE EXTENT THAT MOBUTU'S PARANOIA, AS IT DID IN 1975, PERMITS HIM TO PERCEIVE NOT ONLY A LACK OF APPROVAL BUT A DELIBERATE EFFORT ON OUR PART TO WITHDRAW SUPPORT WITH A VIEW TO INDUCING A CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP. WHILE HE HAS NOT REACHED THAT POINT YET, THERE ARE SOME SIGNS (E.G., SUGGESTIONS OF US INVOLVEMENT IN THE RECENT COUP PLOT) OF A TENDENCY IN THAT DIRECTION.

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8. MOBUTU'S POLITICAL IMPERATIVES: IT WOULD BE LOGICAL TO CON-
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CLUDE THAT MOBUTU'S URGENT DESIRE FOR US AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT WORLD COMPEL HIM TOWARD GREATER RESPONSIVENESS AND COOPERATION IN THOSE AREAS HE KNOWS ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR RELATIONS, SUCH AS ECONOMIC REFORM, POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS AND A CRACKDOWN ON CORRUPTION. WE BELIEVE THAT IN FACT THIS HAS BEEN THE CASE IN MANY INSTANCES, INCLUDING THE STRESS MOBUTU HAS PUT ON HIS REFORM PROGRAM AND SOME OF HIS OBVIOUS EFFORTS TO DEMONSTRATE MORE OPEN AND EQUITABLE FUNCTIONING OF THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. BUT WE MUST BEAR IN MIND THAT, DESPITE HIS NEED FOR OUR HELP IN SURVIVING THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS, THERE ARE POWERFUL INHIBITIONS TO MOBUTU'S BEING AS RESPONSIVE AS WE WOULD LIKE. ONE IS HIS EXTRAORDINARY PRIDE, WHICH ALREADY HAS TAKEN A SEVERE BATTERING AS REPEATEDLY HE HAS HAD TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC WEAKNESS, ADMIT PAST ERRORS SUCH AS NATIONALIZATION, AND IMPORT INCREASING NUMBERS OF FOREIGN EXPERTS TO SALVAGE WHAT IS LEFT. ALL THIS MEANS THAT MOBUTU HAS HAD TO EAT A LOT OF POLITICAL CROW, AND WHILE STILL PRAGMATIC HE NEVERTHELESS IS BOUND TO BE SENSITIVE TO ANYTHING THAT SMACKS OF ADDITIONAL OUTSIDE PRESSURE.

9. AN EQUALLY IMPORTANT INHIBITION TO MOBUTU'S BEING MORE RESPONSIVE TO OUR CONCERNS IS THE POLITICAL IMPERATIVES HE PERCEIVES FOR REMAINING IN POWER. EVEN MAKING ALLOWANCES FOR IMPULSIVE ACTIONS, MOBUTU MUST HAVE REALIZED THAT SOME OF HIS ACTIONS--INCLUDING THE SUDDEN ARREST AND TRIAL FOR TREASON OF FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER NGUZA AND THE GOZ'S MORE RECENT REPRESSION OF CIVIL UNREST IN BANDUNDU AND EXECUTIONS OF ALLEGED COUP PLOTTERS--WOULD INEVITABLY HURT HIS IMAGE JUST WHEN HE WAS MAKING A MAJOR EFFORT TO WIN NEW SUPPORT ABROAD. THE LESSON IS THAT, WHEN FACED WITH SUCH DECISIONS, MOBUTU WILL ALWAYS OPT FOR WHATEVER HE DEEMS ESSENTIAL IN TERMS OF HIS IMMEDIATE POLITICAL SITUATION AT HOME, REGARDLESS OF THE PRICE HE MAY HAVE TO PAY ABROAD OVER THE LONGER RUN.

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10. CONCLUSION: THE REST OF THIS YEAR WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR MOBUTU AS THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ATTENDANT POPULAR DISAFFECTION WITH THE REGIME DEEPEN. BARRING THE ALWAYS UNPREDICTABLE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT OR AN UNLIKELY MAJOR ATTACK FROM ANGOLA, MOBUTU

WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL CONTROL DURING THAT PERIOD. HOWEVER, THIS MAY REQUIRE INCREASING USE OF FORCE, WITH THE RESULTING RISKS OF CONFRONTATION AND GREATER POLITICAL UNREST. IN THE LONGER RUN, MOBUTU'S SURVIVAL WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON ASSURING INTERNAL SECURITY BUT ON EASING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HARDSHIPS AFFLICTING MOST ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION BEFORE THEIR ENDURANCE RUNS OUT. MOBUTU'S ABILITY TO ACHIEVE THESE TWIN GOALS OF MAINTAINING CONTROL WHILE TURNING THE ECONOMY AROUND IS INCREASINGLY UNCERTAIN.

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